

PREVENTION AND PLANNING FOR FATHERHOOD

"If I can
dedicate my-
self, hope-
fully he will
always feel
loved by me."



The Issue

Traditional pregnancy prevention efforts largely have focused on the female's role in preventing pregnancy, while ignoring the male's responsibility in prevention. In recent years, as fatherhood issues have come into focus on policy agendas, states are beginning to discover the importance of engaging and involving men and young boys in curriculums and programs that target pregnancy prevention.

Those who experience an unintended pregnancy tend to be disproportionately poor, are less educated and are unmarried. The children born to poor mothers and fathers also are at increased risk of juvenile delinquency, high school drop-out, substance abuse and becoming teen parents. Children born to teen parents are at an even greater risk (figure 1). Teens who have additional children are at risk of a life of poverty for themselves and their children (figure 2).

The United States spends between \$6.9 billion and \$18.6 billion each year on public assistance for families

that are begun as a result of a teen pregnancy.⁵ Factoring in the social implications of lost wages, productivity and diversion of resources associated with early childbearing and health care, the United States loses an additional \$8.9 billion to \$28.8 billion each year.⁶

To understand the role that men and young boys play in pregnancy prevention, it is important to clarify attitudes about sex and contraception. More than half of all 15- to 19-year-old males have had sexual intercourse, and among 19-year-olds that number increases to 85 percent.⁷ Despite the increase in condom use by boys aged 15 to 19, less than half use condoms every time they have sexual intercourse.⁸ Although surveys report that males agree that they should discuss contraception with their partners, findings indicate that there is a gap between knowledge, practice and behavior change.⁹

Meeting the Challenge— Policy Options for States

It is no easy task to reach men and young boys to talk about sex, contra-

ception and parenting. A starting point is to challenge the existing expectations that young boys and males do not play a role in prevention, or that they are uninterested in learning. Few school-based curriculum that teach teens about sex and contraception include specialized lessons that focus on the male role in pregnancy prevention or the implications of child support and welfare if they become fathers.

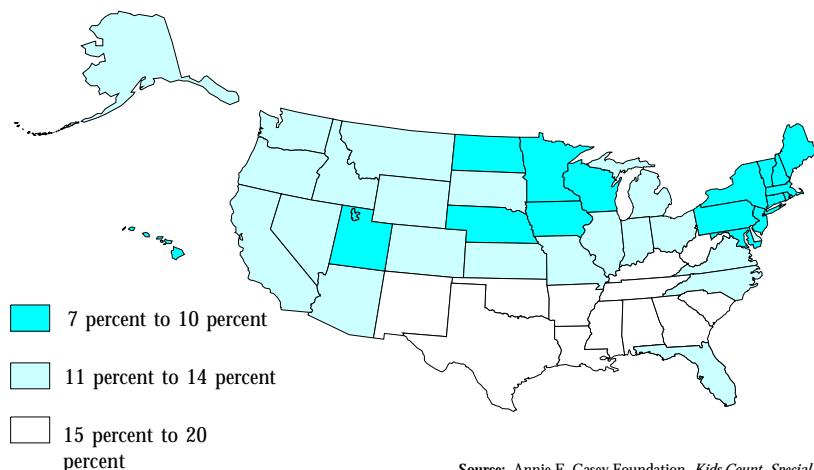
More than half of existing prevention efforts are school or community-based strategies that often have added a male involvement component to an existing activity.¹⁰ Other strategies include mentor or peer support programs and media campaigns.

Prevention programs engage adolescent boys and young men in peer education, mentoring programs and youth conferences and at nontraditional venues such as work place programs and sporting events. Programs aim to educate males about their role in preventing teen pregnancy and offer males who do cause a pregnancy an understanding of their financial and emotional responsibilities as a father.

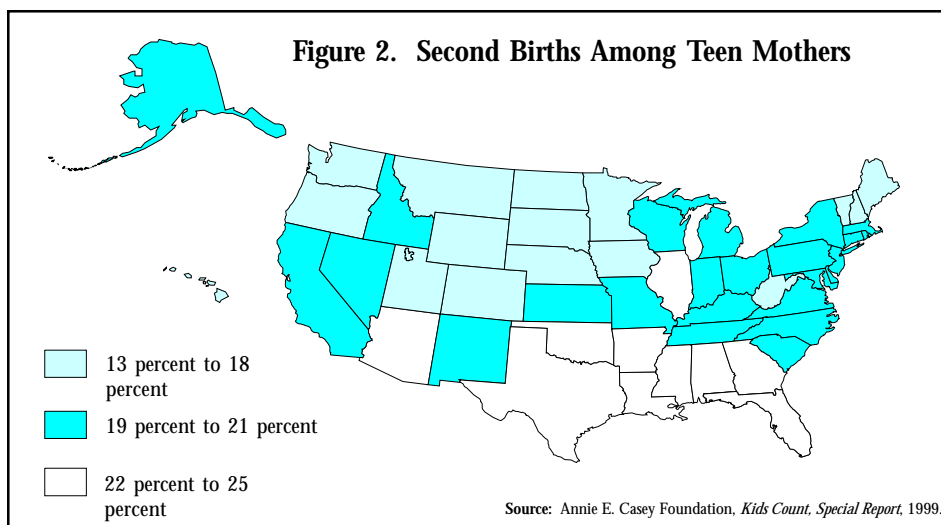
School and Community-Based Programs

Prevention programs in schools center on abstinence education, contraception information, or a combination of both to inform school-age children and teens about preventing pregnancy. Many experts agree that a broad-based approach that uses an abstinence message in tandem with information about contraception is key to reaching a wide range of teens who may be at various stages in their development and consideration of sexual activity.

Figure 1. Teen Births as a Percentage of Total Births (by State)



Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count, Special Report*, 1999.



Community-based programs involve parents, community leaders and volunteers from local churches and organizations in providing pregnancy prevention strategies. Some programs use advertising campaigns to encourage abstinence or promote the use of contraceptives. Others provide adolescent males with adult role models who can help to nurture and support responsible behavior. Still other programs engage males outside of school by connecting with them at work or sporting events and then discussing relevant issues, including pregnancy prevention.

California implemented the first state-wide male involvement program in the United States in 1995. The program's goal is to reduce teen pregnancy through community involvement and youth leadership and to motivate adolescent boys and young men to take responsibility in preventing teen pregnancy. The program is targeted at 15- to 24-year-old males residing in counties with the highest teen birth rates.

The California Legislature appropriated \$2.9 million from the general fund in fiscal year 1999-2000 for the Male Involvement Program (MIP). The money is divided among 25 community-based agencies that provide male orientated services to prevent pregnancy. These services include youth development, education classes, peer education, youth leadership development, male involve-

ment groups, media campaigns, community programs and street outreach programs.

Agencies identify programs that will best meet local needs, effectively reduce teen pregnancy and increase male involvement. California's Office of Family Planning must approve all programs, and priority is given to programs that integrate male youth into the planning and implementation process. The state encourages programs to promote community involvement and collaboration among different public and private service providers. California also targets male teens in the juvenile justice system by emphasizing pregnancy prevention among adolescents and by teaching fathering skills to teen fathers.

California's street outreach program covers such issues as gang involvement, drugs and alcohol abuse, and helps boys and young men deal with problems at home before it addresses teen preg-

nancy prevention. The program focuses on issues of respect, leadership and responsibility and, in doing so, addresses pregnancy prevention. Once involved in the program, adolescent and young adult males are given opportunities to learn new skills, and receive job training, work on communication, and learn about sexuality and male responsibilities.

California has had some success with its pregnancy prevention and male involvement programs. The state teen pregnancy rate declined 24 percent, from 75 per 1,000 in 1991 to 57 per 1,000 in 1997, and its out-of-wedlock birth rate declined 5.7 percent between 1994 and 1997, the greatest decrease in the United States. As a result of the decrease, California was one of five states to be awarded \$20 million from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in accordance with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Illegitimacy Reduction Bonus.

In addition, nearly 25,000 adolescent boys and young men are connected with the male involvement program each year. A 1998 survey showed that more males now (than before the MIP was implemented) are aware of where to get contraception, the risk of pregnancy at first sex, and that contraception is a shared responsibility. Due to the program, more adolescent males (an increase from 41 percent to 63 percent) know the pregnancy risk from using the withdrawal method and more (an increase from 68 percent to 85 percent) are better educated about statutory rape.

Pregnancy Prevention: Old Paradigm

- Prevention strategies should be targeted primarily to females because they are the ones who become pregnant
- Programs for boys can be added to those designed for girls
- Boys are not interested in learning about or responsible enough to handle their role in prevention

Pregnancy Prevention: New Paradigm

- Prevention strategies work better when they target both young men and young women
- Men and boys need services designed to address their specific needs
- Males are eager to learn about their role in pregnancy prevention if they are made aware of that role in a conditional setting

After school and weekend programs take several different approaches to build self-esteem and self-worth and also offer information about pregnancy prevention. These programs keep adolescents and young adults occupied by giving them places to go and providing them with information that will enable them to make responsible decisions. Programs can offer job training that teaches skills to men and young boys. Programs also can provide participants with health services and education, including information about sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, and the social and financial responsibilities of fatherhood.

Maryland's Healthy Teens and Young Adult Initiative provides family planning services to male and female adolescents. The legislature appropriates \$1.5 million annually to fund three sites that provide male involvement opportunities. The program operates sites in areas with the highest birth and STD rates.

The Healthy Teens Center in Landover, Maryland, provides adolescent boys and young men between the ages of 10 and 24 with reproductive health care services. The goal of the center is to give males health care services that are comparable to those provided to women and that will enable them to be sexually responsible. Clients under age 19 receive these services at no cost, while older clients pay based on a sliding fee scale.

The center offers a full range of reproductive health care services and tries to help males understand that having a child or contracting a sexually transmitted disease (STD) is their responsibility. New clients are required to participate in a health education session conducted by a male involvement coordinator. Topics covered in the session include communication, contraception, STDs and violence against female partners. Clients also are asked to choose the birth control method that

Policy Considerations

- Integrate responsible parenthood and fatherhood curricula into existing abstinence and sexuality education and STD/HIV prevention education.
- Conduct media campaigns on abstinence, pregnancy prevention and the use of contraceptives.
- Use public service announcements to encourage parents to discuss sex with adolescents.
- Conduct outreach programs for school dropouts and boys and young males involved in gangs.
- Use employment and sports as a way to connect with adolescent males.
- Host after-school activities and events to keep adolescent males active and under adult supervision.
- Offer information about human sexuality and contraception to males at health clinics.
- Require adolescents who are involved in the juvenile justice system to attend life skills and parenthood courses.
- Use mentoring programs to provide adolescent boys and young men with positive adult role models.

they feel is right for them and then are given detailed information about how to get it and use it correctly.

The male involvement program at the Healthy Teens Center relies heavily on male participation in sports to attract males to the program. By conducting sports physicals for adolescent and young adults, the center is able to use that opportunity to discuss other issues such as reproductive health. The center uses the negative social behaviors of popular sports figures to broach discussion of sex, drugs and violence. In addition, local ministers conduct group counseling sessions once a week. Sponsors of these sessions hope to inspire participants to rethink their attitudes and behaviors regarding sexual practices, risk taking and violence.

The Healthy Teens Center also conducts health education presentations in local middle and high schools on contraception, STD/HIV prevention, acquaintance rape, decision-making and peer pressure, relationships, and male and female anatomy and physiology. The center also conducts a community outreach program. Individuals from the center go to housing projects, meet with church groups, and talk with teens and young adults on the street about

teen issues, including teen pregnancy, contraceptives and peer pressure. They also provide information about contraceptives and teach boys and young men self-esteem and self-respect.

The center also refers young fathers who do not have contact with their children to the Northwestern High School Young Fathers Program. Goals of this program are to prevent future unwanted pregnancies and to help reestablish relationships between young fathers and their children. Participants in the program learn about custody rights, child support and how to provide for their children both financially and emotionally.

Maryland has been successful in reducing pregnancies. The state teen pregnancy rates were reduced from 54 per 1,000 in 1991 to 44 per 1,000 in 1997, a decrease of 19 percent. Although teen pregnancy rates in Maryland have dropped, the state cannot pinpoint which programs have played a role in the decrease. Measuring the success of the Healthy Teen and Young Adult Initiative has been difficult because participants who go through the program are not tracked. Although not enough data has been collected to show a direct correlation between the MIP program and the drop in pregnancy, department and clinic volunteers cite anecdotal evidence and are optimistic about the program's success.

Types of Prevention Strategies

- School or community-based programs
- Mentor programs
- Media campaigns

Mentoring Programs

Mentoring programs are another way to connect with adolescents and young adults. Although mentoring programs usually do not have a specific prevention message, they encourage positive behavior, which is linked to lowering the risk for early pregnancy. Participants are connected with either an adult male or a peer mentor from the community who serves as a positive role model. The hope is that the mentor will help boys develop a vision of a positive future and a sense of value.

Programs encourage participants to develop their talents and pursue their interests with long-term goals in mind. Studies show that teens and young adults with a sense of future are less likely to cause a pregnancy. Most programs promote positive social and health behaviors and do not specifically deal with sexual health issues.

The Brother to Brother after-school program in Wake County, **North Carolina**, works with African-American adolescents by providing them with a five-week life education course that addresses such issues as self-esteem, relationships and sexuality. Young African-American male high school and college students act as peer mentors throughout the course and help facilitate discussions.

Participants take field trips that relate to the lessons learned. These may include visiting a cultural museum or African-American-owned business. The program attempts to involve participants' parents in the program by hosting Parents' Day, where participants can share what they have learned. Mentors continue to meet with the participants every two weeks for six months after the program has ended. These meetings help participants improve the skills they have learned and provide them with an opportunity to gather new information.

The Young Leaders Academy in Baton Rouge, **Louisiana**, seeks to provide long-term mentoring and self-esteem building services for young, at-risk boys from low-income communities. The program works with teachers in the local school district to identify third-grade boys who demonstrate leadership potential. Boys participate in the program for six years. During this time, boys can participate in after-school tutoring for two hours Monday through Thursday. On Saturdays and during the summer, boys take part in an extended program designed to enrich their future potential by focusing on selected activities, including academics, field trips, tutoring, team building exercises, problem solving, communication skills enhancement, decision making and visits from special guests. The academy involves participants with community service activities to help create a sense of ownership and responsibility for their community.

In the 1998 academic year, the academy worked actively with the Junior League of Baton Rouge at different venues each month. Some examples of academy projects include helping at the Baton Rouge Food Bank and the Habitat for Humanity, and interaction with children at the Louisiana School for the Deaf. The program also pairs the boys with a male mentor. Mentors help to create an extended family by placing a strong, positive role model in each boy's life for him to emulate. After finishing the program, each boy will receive a corporate internship while he is completing high school. The long-term goal of the academy is to prepare these boys for college and for success in the work force.

Boys involved with the program are succeeding academically, according to program coordinator Tangelia Colson. "By the time these boys reach middle school and beyond, they are equipped with the tools to resist many of the peer pressures that other boys their age fall vic-

tim to. They are already on a path to success."

Media Campaigns

Some programs use media campaigns to encourage abstinence or promote the use of contraceptives. Media campaigns are designed to promote positive attitudes and responsible behavior among teens and young adults. More than 40 states have developed or launched media campaigns to reduce teen pregnancy aimed at teens and adults.¹¹ Some campaigns encourage teens and young adults to abstain from sex, while others encourage those who are sexually active to use contraception. Still other campaigns encourage parents to talk with their kids about love and sex.

Kentucky launched a \$500,000 advertising campaign in January 1999 that stresses the importance of abstinence. This media campaign was the second installment of the 1998 campaign, "Get a Life First. Wait to Have Sex." After reviewing the first series of ads, the campaign was changed to be more consequence-specific, including showing a teenage boy who contracted a sexually transmitted disease and a girl who tries to care for a baby while having to work.

The importance of including males in pregnancy prevention programs is undeniable, yet involving boys and young adults in these programs remains a challenge. Programs that connect with males by building positive self-images, promoting positive behavior and giving them hope for the future will have the best chance of success. Also successful are programs that educate males about the financial and social responsibilities associated with having a child and those that also provide information about pregnancy prevention.

—By Matt O'Connor and
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Notes

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3. Rebekah Saul, "Using and Misusing Data on Age Differences Between Minors and Their Sexual Partners," *The Guttmacher Report*, 2, no. 4 (Washington, D.C.: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, August 1999), 10.
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9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 19.



Need more information about prevention strategies? Contact the NCSL Adolescent Health Project at (303) 830-2200.